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## The motives of students practising shōtōkan karate-dō in the light of the somatic culture patterns

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**Key words:** sociology, martial arts, karate-dō, body, somatic culture patterns, motivation

### Abstract:

The aim of this article is to present the motives of students practising shōtōkan karate-dō with reference to the theory of the somatic culture patterns. The main research problem was to check which patterns of somatic culture were preferred the most and which the least by examining the motivations of karate-dō students. It had been assumed that the most preferred pattern is the positive aesthetic pattern of self-fulfillment, whereas the least preferred is the hedonistic pattern. Additionally, it had been assumed that karate-dō is practised for hygienic reasons. To test the proposed hypotheses 15 IDI (individual in-depth interviews) were conducted using a questionnaire prepared by the author. The interviewees were selected by the purposive sampling method. As a result of conducted research, it turned out that students practise karate-dō mainly because of the need for moral and spiritual development. Thus, it was concluded that the positive aesthetic pattern of self-fulfillment is the predominant one among the research group, whereas hedonistic and hygienic motivations are less noticeable. The reason for this is the considerable average time of practising karate-dō in the research group (9 years), which indicates higher awareness of its spiritual and moral value.

### Introduction

For many years in social sciences the concept of the ‘body’ has been underestimated. Concepts such as values and attitudes and the processes like emerging of the social bonds and groups were the subjects of sociological scientific insight, however, the body itself has not been the starting point of such research [Shilling 2010: 33]. Nowadays, the body of a human being has gained its proper status. Interpersonal relationships cannot be studied without the proper attention given to the body as the fundamental aspect of face-to-face human contact, even when it serves purposes not directly connected with communication, but it is intentionally used to create the impression intended by the ‘owner’ of the body [Goffman 2000]. Moreover, the human body is glorified in the contemporary post-modern world as a part of public discourse, especially in mass media [see: Cieślak 2008]. The concept of the body can also be used as a key idea to explain the existing social order, for example, in one takes into consideration the feministic discourse [Millet 1970; Wolf 2008]. These are just some examples showing that the body plays a significant role in contemporary research.

However, our focus here will be more narrow and we will try to analyse following problem: what role the concept of the body plays in martial arts, especially in *karate-dō*, and how it is perceived by the students practising this Japanese martial art.

Martial arts have gained considerable popularity on all continents. One of the reasons for this popularity is the unique combination of two types of values which can clearly be found in martial arts. On the one hand, these values are connected with somatic aspect of a human being and they include physical training of the body in order to acquire bodily features like speed and flexibility. On the other hand, moral values, such as bravery or perfectionism, are also present in martial arts. Therefore, they can be seen as a holistic method of self-development [Cynarski 2010], which includes both: the body and the mind in a constant strive towards perfectionism. This is reflected in the concept of Japanese *budō* which can be understood in many different ways [see: Cynarski 2004: 159-172], one of them being an axio-normative system which determines the road of autcreation [Cynarski, Obodyński 2008]. It is often stressed that martial arts are not just a

mere collection of physical moves, but a method of expressing the Far Eastern philosophy in motion [Tokarski 1989]. Martial arts, at least in theory, bond somatic development with mental progress, thus being a holistic tool for self-development.

The aim of the research undertaken here was to check whether this statement is true with reference to *shōtōkan karate-dō* students. In this work the reference is made to the theory of patterns of the somatic culture outlined by Krawczyk [2011] who discussed, among others, the ascetic, hedonistic and hygienic patterns. The first one focuses mainly on moral and spiritual virtues, the second one on pleasure, whereas the third one on health. This was further developed by Cynarski [2011] who described the positive ascetic pattern of self-fulfillment, in which human activity is directed especially towards moral and spiritual development. Therefore, it had been assumed that:

Hypothesis 1. The pattern of the somatic culture which is the most preferred by the *karate-dō* students is the positive aesthetic pattern of self-fulfillment;

Hypothesis 2. *Karate-dō* is practised for hygienic reasons;

Hypothesis 3. The least preferred pattern of somatic culture is the hedonistic pattern.

## Methods

All individual in-depth interviews (IDI) that served as a research material for this work were recorded with a digital voice recorder. The purposive sampling method used for this research encompassed 15 students from the Lublin's Traditional Karate Club who had been practising *karate-dō* for at least 3 years prior to the research moment and had at least blue belt (5 *kyū*). The research group included persons of age ranging from 15 to 31 years (the average age of a person from the research group was 24 years). At the time of the research, the shortest training period for an individual person was 3 years, while the longest was 19 years. The average training period in the research group amounted to 9 years. In total, 15 IDI were recorded with the members of the Lublin's Traditional Karate Club.

For this study the most important questions in the research tool included: 2<sup>nd</sup> – Why did you start practising *karate-dō*? 4<sup>th</sup> – In your opinion, what values does *karate-dō* transmit? 5<sup>th</sup> – What is your motivation for practising *karate-dō*? 13<sup>th</sup> – What character traits does practising *karate-dō* develop? 35<sup>th</sup> – How does practising *karate-dō* influence your physical and psychological health? 41<sup>st</sup> – Is practising *karate-dō* a source of pleasure for you? If so, what type of pleasure is it?

## Results

Hypothesis 1. The pattern of the somatic culture which is the most preferred by the *karate-dō* students is the positive aesthetic pattern of self-fulfillment.

After analysing the data collected from the IDI, it turned out that most of the students (11 persons) named moral and spiritual factors and the ones driving their motivation for practising *karate-dō*. This can be best illustrated by quoting one of them: 'Practising karate teaches discipline. This is the most important thing. Moreover, it builds character. Why does it build character? Because it teaches to defeat one's weaknesses. After walking on the mat, you look your opponent straight in the eyes and you have two ways out: either run away or fight with that man, so it's a kind of test of your own weaknesses. [...] Thanks to this I have a different perspective on life, different perspective on my problems – I don't run away from them, I don't hide my head under a pillow – I face them, I ask myself a question: what should I do to solve these problems?'

Only some of *karate-dō* students from the research group (6 persons) indicated the need for improving their physical condition as the main motif for starting and continuing their trainings. There were also students who see both – bodily and spiritual – benefits of practising the martial art under consideration. Nevertheless, the positive aesthetic pattern of self-fulfillment is focused especially on moral and spiritual development, in which striving for physical perfection is just a vehicle for it [Cynarski 2011: 206]. It turned out that most of the interviewees understood this body-mind interrelation very well. For example, one of them said: 'It's well known that there always is a healthy mind in a healthy body. If people are fit, they are also happier, they are in a good mood and so on...' The other interviewee stated that: 'When a person develops physically, he or she develops psychically as well. Practising karate helps me to unwind, to relax. After I get physically exhausted, I can get psychological rest as well'.

In conclusion, the analysis of collected empirical data allows for the assumption that the pattern of the somatic culture the most preferred by the *karate-dō* students is the positive aesthetic pattern of self-fulfillment.

Hypothesis 2. *Karate-dō* is practised for hygienic reasons.

Already when discussing the first hypothesis we could see that some interviewees pointed to the aspect of health or hygiene as one of the factors driving their motivation for practising *karate-dō*. This would indicate the preferred hygienic pattern of

the somatic culture as defined by Krawczyk [2011]. However, it seems that this is pattern is not the prevailing one in the research group. Of course, there were some persons who mentioned hygienic reasons or the need to improve their health as the main motif for their involvement in karate-dō (4 people), but they did not consist the majority of interviewees.

Some representative statements of the interviewees who practise karate-dō for hygienic reasons include the following: 'I lacked movement and physical development. When you study non-stop, sit in lectures or university classes, you lack movement and that was when I decided to practise something, but at that time I didn't know it would be karate. I was looking for something that would help me move around, improve my physical condition.' The other person said: 'I rather wanted to develop my body, physical fitness. I wanted to improve my physical condition, to move around; I didn't want to get old in a sitting position.'

Therefore, the analysis of collected empirical data allows for the assumption that karate-dō is also, but not mainly, practised for hygienic reasons.

Hypothesis 3. The least preferred pattern of somatic culture is the hedonistic pattern.

When asked about *karate-dō* as a source of pleasure, most of the interviewees (9 people) explained that the kind of pleasure they get from practising karate-dō is *not* physical pleasure, but rather psychological pleasure in a form of satisfaction. For instance, one of them said: 'If during a training my attack reaches its target, suddenly I get such a boost, right? Or when I can see that I can do something better than the others after training very hard.' The other person when asked about the pleasure resulting from being a karate-dō student noticed: 'The pleasure is when you train hard and later you see the results, for example, you learnt new *kata*, you won a fight at a karate competition or you can do the splits lower than you did before. So, this is the satisfaction you get from your success.'

The other group of karate-dō students (6 people) in their answers to the question about the type of pleasure they get from practising karate-dō mentioned physical pleasure. For example, one of them said: 'Physical pleasure, as stupid as it may sound, but this pleasant feeling of being exhausted after trainings. I mean the muscle sores I feel after my muscles have worked, after I have been active. Pleasure from movement!' However, they often pointed to physical pleasure understood as a prerequisite for psychological pleasure. For instance, one of them noticed: 'When I get tired, I feel that I threw away negative energy. I like this so much and thanks to this I can relax.' The other one

went even further by saying: 'This pleasure can be compared to having sex (laughter), you know, in a sense it influences your good mood.'

Therefore, the collected empirical data points to the fact that the least preferred pattern of somatic culture among karate-dō students is the hedonistic pattern. Even if they treat kinetic sensations as a source of pleasure, they frequently join it with psychological pleasure, i.e. physical pleasure is not an aim in itself, but it is rather treated as a mean to achieve deeper psychological pleasure and satisfaction.

## Discussion and conclusions

Certainly there still is a need for empirical verification of theories and theoretical statements proposed by scholars dealing with sport and martial arts. An example of this is the belief that the aim of practising martial arts is also (apart from physical development) connected with broadly understood 'psychological health and personal development' [Theeboom, De Knop, Vertonghen 2009: 21], 'spiritual development' [Cynarski 2006: 80] or 'self-fulfilment' [Tokarski 1989: 10]. In other words, it is argued that martial arts, such as karate-dō, not only transfer hygienic values (e.g. health), but also moral virtues, which are also found in sport and which include, for instance: bravery, justice and prudence [Kowalczyk 2010: 134-140]. This makes martial arts an axiologically complex phenomenon, contrary to combat sports. Those who practise the latter focus mainly on competitiveness and – as the research indicates – their motivation is to achieve a high sports result [Witkowski, Cynarski, Błażejowski 2013: 21].

Of course, it is up to the martial arts' students which aspect they will chose to pursue and develop the most. We have to keep in mind that nowadays the above-mentioned types of values, as well as the somatic culture patters mentioned here, have been mixed. This occurred mainly as a result of globalization and commercialization of culture [Cynarski 2012: 257]. Nevertheless, from our research we can draw the following conclusions:

Hypothesis 1 has been positively verified, so we can say that the positive aesthetic pattern of self-fulfillment is preferred by the members of the Lublin's Traditional Karate Club. However, we have to be aware that most of the interviewees were quite experienced karate-dō students. Other research into the motivation of martial arts' students indicated that motivation was dependent on the period of trainings: the longer the training period, the more evident were the spiritual and moral motivations

for practising karate [Bógdał, Syska 2002]. Thus, the results obtained here are in accordance with results of similar research. They include, for example, the quantitative one conducted on 50 members of the Karate-dō Shōtōkan Club in Opole [Kuśnierz 2011], as well as the broad international analysis of 380 papers concerning the positive social-psychological outcomes of practising various martial arts [Vertonghen, Theeboom 2010].

Hypothesis 2 'Karate-dō is practised for hygienic reasons' has been only partly verified. Therefore, we can conclude that the hygienic pattern of somatic culture is not preferred by members of the research group as the predominant one. It is interesting to note here that in Buddhism, which is (among others) the ideological base of karate-dō, physical processes are dependent upon mental processes and vice versa [Wilson 2004: 63]. It seems that for most of the interviewees this relationship is not really important, or simply too obvious to discuss it. Generally, they do not treat karate-dō as a tool for improving their health, but rather as a method of self-fulfillment.

Hypothesis 3, which stated that the least preferred pattern of somatic culture is the hedonistic pattern, has been confirmed. It is true that psychical movement can be treated as a source of pleasure. Therefore, practising various sports and some martial arts for pleasure, i.e. because of motives connected with recreation rather than spiritual progress, is also possible [Cynarski 2012: 252-253]. However, having a strong axiological influence, martial arts predominantly shape the personality of people who practise them, whereas physical pleasure can be seen as a kind of side-effect. It has been proved that the evaluation of the value of martial arts depends on the level of knowledge about them [Cynarski, Kuśnierz, Witkowski: 2012]. Similarly, the experienced karate-dō competitors, who were the research group in this study, focus on self-fulfillment through spiritual improvement rather than hedonistic aspects of martial arts. Therefore, we can conclude that they primarily wish to develop humanistic and moral values connected with *idō* [Cynarski 2012: 13] such as self-discipline, prudence and bravery.

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### Motywacje osób uprawiających *shōtōkan karate-dō* w kontekście wzorów kultury fizycznej

**Słowa kluczowe:** socjologia, sztuki walki, karate-dō, ciało, wzory kultury fizycznej, motywacja

#### Streszczenie

We wstępie artykułu pokrótce zarysowano problematykę związaną z koncepcją ciała we współczesnej socjologii. Zauważono istotność tego zagadnienia dla rozważań socjologicznych na temat sztuk walki, szczególnie w kontekście motywacji do ich uprawiania. Sztuki walki, w tym *karate-dō* będące głównym tematem rozważań w niniejszym artykule, traktowane są jako holistyczna metoda rozwoju własnego ciała i umysłu.

Celem przeprowadzonych przez autora badań było sprawdzenie i opisanie czy rzeczywiście osoby uprawiające sztuki walki, a konkretnie *shōtōkan karate-dō*, uświadamiają sobie istnienie takiej zależności, w tym dominacji wartości moralnych nad wartościami witalnymi. Posłużono się przy tym teorią wzorów kultury fizycznej, w kontekście której postawiono następujące hipotezy:

1. Wzorem kultury fizycznej najbardziej preferowanym przez osoby uprawiające *karate-dō* jest wzór pozytywnej ascezy, samorealizacyjny;
2. Badani uprawiają *karate-dō* ze względów zdrowotno-higienicznych;

3. Najmniej preferowanym przez badanych wzorem kultury fizycznej jest wzór hedonistyczny.

Metoda. Przeprowadzono indywidualne wywiady pogłębione z 15 osobami należącymi do Lubelskiego Klubu Karate Tradycyjnego. Respondenci zostali dobrani metodą celową, przy czym podstawowe kryteria doboru stanowiły łącznie: minimum 3-letni staż uprawiania *karate-dō* oraz posiadanie stopnia zaawansowania 5 *kyū*. W grupie badanych osób znaleźli się respondenci w wieku od 15 do 31 lat (średnia wieku wyniosła 24 lata), a średni czas uprawiania przez nich tej sztuki walki wyniósł 9 lat.

Wyniki i wnioski. W efekcie weryfikacji hipotez stwierdzono, że: 1) osoby uprawiające *karate-dō* faktycznie preferują wzór pozytywnej ascezy, samorealizacyjny; istotny jest tutaj relatywnie długi czas uprawiania *karate-dō* przez członków badanej grupy, 2) motywacje zdrowotno-higieniczne również występują wśród badanych osób, jednak tylko u nielicznych respondentów jako główny motyw uprawiania *karate-dō*, 3) typ hedonistyczny jest najmniej preferowanym wzorem kultury fizycznej, ponieważ zdecydowana większość członków Lubelskiego Klubu Karate Tradycyjnego traktuje kinetyczne doznania cielesne tylko jako środek do uzyskania głębszej satysfakcji duchowej na drodze realizacji wartości moralnych powiązanych z uprawianiem sztuk walki.